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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001964

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SA/EX

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SUBJECT: NEPAL'S EX-PRIME MINISTER DISCUSSES HIS OUSTER BY THE KING

REF: KATHMANDU 1932

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION ROBERT BOGGS. REASONS: 1.5 (B and D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. IN A MEETING ON OCTOBER 7 WITH THE AMBASSADOR, SHER BAHADUR DEUBA DESCRIBED THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING HIS OCTOBER 4 DISMISSAL AS PRIME MINISTER BY KING GYANENDRA. CLEARLY STUNG BY THE KING'S PUBLIC CRITICISM OF HIS COMPETENCE, DEUBA SAID THAT HE HAD REJECTED ON CONSTITUTIONAL GROUNDS THE KING'S REPEATED REQUESTS THAT HE RESIGN. PORTRAYING HIMSELF AS THE HAPLESS VICTIM OF BAD ADVICE REGARDING THE FEASIBILITY OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER, DEUBA INDICATED THAT HIS NEPALI CONGRESS (DEMOCRATIC) PARTY WOULD NOT JOIN A NEW GOVERNMENT APPOINTED BY THE KING, BUT WOULD NOT CARRY HIS GRIEVANCES WITH GYANENDRA TO THE STREETS. SINCE THIS MEETING, DEUBA SEEMS TO BE HEWING TO THE COURSE RECOMMENDED BY THE AMBASSADOR OF DEDICATING HIMSELF TO STRENGTHENING HIS PARTY AND PREPARING HIMSELF TO CONTEST THE NEXT ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) IN RESPONSE TO A REQUEST BY THE AMBASSADOR FOR A MEETING WITH HIM, EX-PRIME MINISTER SHER BAHADUR DEUBA APPEARED AT THE AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE AND SPENT AN HOUR DESCRIBING THE CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE DISMISSAL OF HIS GOVERNMENT ON OCTOBER 4 BY KING GYANENDRA (REFTEL). DEUBA WAS CLEARLY AGITATED AND DEFENSIVE. THE KING, DEUBA EXPLAINED, WAS WORRIED ABOUT TALK OF A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY THAT MIGHT REVISE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS MAKING THE ROYAL NEPAL ARMY ACCOUNTABLE TO THE MONARCH. HAVING DECIDED TO GET RID OF THE DEUBA GOVERNMENT, THE KING TWICE, ON OCTOBER 1 AND 3, PRESSED THE PRIME MINISTER TO RESIGN. DEUBA SAID HE HAD REFUSED TO DO SO "ON PRINCIPLE," ARGUING THAT THE KING HAD NO CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY TO DISMISS A PRIME MINISTER WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THE PARLIAMENT.

13. (C) REGARDING THE KING'S PUBLIC CHARGES THAT HE WAS "INCOMPETENT" TO HOLD CONSTITUTIONALLY MANDATED NATIONAL ELECTIONS ON TIME, THE EX-PRIME MINISTER INSISTED THAT THE KING HAD NO LEGITIMATE BASIS FOR SUCH A CHARGE. IT WAS NEPAL'S SECURITY OFFICIALS WHO HAD ASSURED HIM INITIALLY, HE EXPLAINED, THAT ELECTIONS WOULD BE FEASIBLE IN MID-NOVEMBER DESPITE THE MAOIST INSURGENCY. ONLY RECENTLY HAD THOSE SAME OFFICIALS INFORMED HIM THAT SUCH ELECTIONS WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE. IT WAS THE LEADERS OF THE OTHER LARGE PARTIES, FURTHERMORE, WHO PERSUADED HIM ON OCT 3 THAT HE SHOULD RECOMMEND TO THE KING THAT THE ELECTIONS BE POSTPONED. CHANGING CONDITIONS AND CHANGING COUNSEL HAD REQUIRED HIM TO CHANGE HIS POLICY. DEUBA ATTRIBUTED GYANENDRA'S CRITICISM OF HIM TO THE KING'S PIQUE THAT HE WOULD NOT RESIGN.

14. (C) DURING HIS MEETING WITH THE KING RECOMMENDING A POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS, DEUBA SAID, HE HAD OFFERED TO FIRE CORRUPT MINISTERS IN HIS CABINET AND REPLACE THEM WITH TECHNOCRATS OR OTHER PERSONS RECOMMENDED BY THE KING. INSTEAD, THE KING HAD PRESSED DEUBA AGAIN TO RESIGN, PROMISING TO APPOINT DEUBA AS PRIME MINISTER AGAIN AFTER HIS RESIGNATION. THE KING'S SUBSEQUENT DISMISSAL OF HIS GOVERNMENT PROVED, DEUBA ARGUED, THAT THE KING HARBORED OTHER MOTIVES ALL ALONG AND HAD ALREADY DECIDED TO ASSERT MORE DIRECT CONTROL. PALACE INSIDERS TELL HIM, DEUBA SAID, THAT THE KING IS VERY AMBITIOUS. DEUBA SUSPECTED THAT THE KING INTENDED TO APPOINT AND DISMISS SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS ON SPURIOUS GROUNDS FOR 4-5 YEARS, THUS POSTPONING ELECTIONS AND THE RETURN OF POPULAR GOVERNMENT. DEUBA SAID THAT IN THE PAST HE HAD WANTED TO BRING NEW FACES INTO HIS GOVERNMENT AND HAD ASKED THE KING FOR HELP IN GATHERING EVIDENCE OF CORRUPTION AMONG HIS MINISTERS. RATHER THAN ASSIST HIM IN THIS, HOWEVER, THE KING CONTINUED TO MEET WITH CORRUPT MINISTERS. AFTER ALL, DEUBA ALLEGED, THE KING HAD BEEN A CORRUPT BUSINESSMAN HIMSELF BEFORE HIS ACCESSION TO THE THRONE. DEUBA SAID HE DID "NOT MIND" THE CURRENT HOUSE ARREST OF SEVERAL FORMER MINISTERS IN HIS GOVERNMENT ON SUSPICION OF CORRUPTION AND "WOULD BE RELIEVED" IF THEY ACTUALLY WERE INDICTED. HE DID NOT SEEM TO TAKE THIS POSSIBILITY TOO SERIOUSLY, HOWEVER, POINTING OUT THAT MANY OF THE MEN UNDER SUSPICION HAVE CLOSE CONTACTS INSIDE THE PALACE.

15. (C) THE AMBASSADOR RAISED THE QUESTION OF THE RANGE OF CONSULTATIONS THE KING HAD HAD WITH FOREIGN DIPLOMATS BEFORE DISSOLVING PARLIAMENT. THE AMBASSADOR HAD BEEN TOLD BY A WELL-PLACED PALACE OFFICIAL THAT THE KING HAD CONVOKED THE US AND CHINESE AMBASSADORS ON OCTOBER 4, BUT NOT THE INDIAN.

DEUBA SAID HE WAS SURE THAT THE PALACE HAD CONSULTED WITH THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT THROUGH TWO PERSONAL EMISSARIES HE HAD SENT TO NEW DELHI (REPORTEDLY A FORMER DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE, AND THE KING'S BUSINESS PARTNER AND CONFIDANT PRABAKAR RANA) AS WELL AS COMMUNICATING THROUGH TWO RETIRED INDIAN DIPLOMATS (FORMER FOREIGN SECRETARY RASGOTRA, AND FORMER AMBASSADOR TO NEPAL RAJAN) WHEN THE LATTER TWO VISITED KATHMANDU IN SEPTEMBER. DEUBA CONTENDED THAT THE PRICE THE KING WAS PAYING FOR INDIAN SUPPORT FOR HIS ACTIONS WAS INCREASED GOI INFLUENCE IN NEPAL. A RECENT, UNPRECEDENTED PROTEST DEMONSTRATION STAGED OUTSIDE THE PAKISTAN EMBASSY IN KATHMANDU BY NEPALI REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SHIV SENA AND THE PASHUPATINATH TEMPLE IN KATHMANDU WAS CLEARLY MOTIVATED FROM INDIA AND WAS PROOF OF GROWING INDIAN INFLUENCE HERE, DEUBA SAID. (THE NEW PAKISTANI AMBASSADOR SUBSEQUENTLY TOLD US THAT THE DEMONSTRATION WAS A PROTEST AGAINST RECENT ATTACKS ON A HINDU TEMPLE IN GUJARAT.)

16. (C) THE KING, LIKE THE MAOISTS, HAD BETRAYED HIM, DEUBA ASSERTED. THE KING HAD NO LEGAL RIGHT TO SACK HIM, AND DEUBA HAD NO INTENTION OF PROPOSING NAMES FOR THE NEW CABINET OR OF ALLOWING HIS PARTY MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE IN IT. HIS PRINCIPAL GOAL WAS TO BE RE-ELECTED AS PRIME MINISTER. THE AMBASSADOR ENCOURAGED DEUBA TO TAKE THE HIGH ROAD AND REACT POSITIVELY TO THE NEW POLITICAL SITUATION. THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER SHOULD FOCUS HIS ENERGIES PRIMARILY ON STRENGTHENING THE ORGANIZATION OF HIS PARTY AND TAKING HIS PROGRAM TO THE PEOPLE. THE AMBASSADOR REMINDED DEUBA OF HIS IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENTS AS PRIME MINISTER. HE HAD BEEN WELL RECEIVED IN WASHINGTON, HAD INCREASED INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS OF THE MAOIST THREAT, AND SECURED UNPRECEDENTED SECURITY ASSISTANCE. AS PRIME MINISTER HE HAD ALSO PASSED LEGISLATION SUPPORTING POLICIES OF ANTI-CORRUPTION, WOMEN'S RIGHTS, AND ANTI-TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS. DEUBA AGREED; HE WOULD CONCENTRATE ON REORGANIZING HIS PARTY AND WOULD NOT TAKE IT ONTO THE STREETS TO PROTEST THE KING'S ACTIONS. HE EXPRESSED SOME CONCERN, HOWEVER, BY WHAT HE PERCEIVED AS INITIAL EFFORTS BY THE PALACE TO STIFLE FREE EXPRESSION. WHETHER OR NOT HE SUCCEEDED IN HIS ATTEMPTS TO REGAIN THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP, HE ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR, HE WOULD REMAIN A TRUE FRIEND OF THE UNITED STATES.

17. (C) COMMENT. DEUBA CLEARLY WAS BITTER ABOUT HIS UNEXPECTED SACKING BY THE KING, AND HIS SELF-SERVING ASSESSMENT OF THE MONARCH'S MOTIVES AND OBJECTIVES SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN AT FACE VALUE. DESPITE THIS, HOWEVER, HE APPARENTLY HAS TAKEN THE AMBASSADOR'S ADVICE AND MAINTAINED A RELATIVELY DIGNIFIED AND CONSTRUCTIVE PUBLIC STANCE. THE EX-PRIME MINISTER MET WITH THE KING THE DAY AFTER HIS MEETING WITH THE AMBASSADOR. AFTER THE MEETING HE ANNOUNCED TO THE PRESS THAT HIS PARTY WOULD NOT JOIN ANY COUNCIL OF MINISTERS APPOINTED BY THE KING AND CONTINUED TO INSIST THAT THE OUSTER OF HIS GOVERNMENT WAS UNCONSTITUTIONAL. PARTY INSIDERS TELL US, HOWEVER, THAT DEUBA UNDERSTANDS THAT HE MUST BE REALISTIC IN REACTING TO THE NEW POLITICAL SITUATION AND HAS BEGUN TO TURN HIS ATTENTION TO ORGANIZATIONAL WORK WITHIN THE PARTY.

MALINOWSKI